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DISARMAMENT AND ARBITRATION

BY "OBSERVER"

THE student of history and of the international situation of the present day easily perceives that the greatest practical obstacle in the way of disarmament is the unevenness of nations. They do not stand on the same plane of advancement, nor in the same circumstances of possible action. Take the case of Germany. She occupies the central portion of the great plain of northern Europe. Her north is coast-line; on the west is France, on the south is Austria, on the east is Russia, and on every side her frontiers are level and open. No sane man can object that Germany wears something of the aspect of an armed camp, or that, in spite of constitutions, she sustains her men of blood and iron and holds a mailed hand ready instantly to strike wherever attack is threatened. Germany must be taught that the dispositions of men have permanently changed, that dynastic and frontier disputes have been really forgotten, that her own past has been truly forgiven, before she can reasonably be expected to lay her arms aside.

But this is not the whole of Germany's case. It is not one of readiness of defense alone. No one who is conscious of what he sees can come into contact with the middle and upper classes in Germany without noticing a military spirit and an attitude toward armies and war which is different from that which prevails in England or the United States or in any but a comparatively small class in France. The really ruling classes in Germany not merely love the pomp and circumstance of military parade, they really believe in great military preparation in itself considered as a legitimate engine of national upbuilding and national glory, and they do not yet believe in disarmament in itself. This is, no doubt, a result of their history and nothing more than temporary, but it is at present an obstinate fact because

that history is so recent and, in part, because it was so brilliant. The advocate of any plan of disarmament which is intended to be practicable must deal with the fact that Germany does not stand on the same plane of advancement in regard to the general question with the other nations named.

But this also is not all Germany's case. As was perfectly natural, the union of Germany in a new national bond in 1871 was speedily followed by the birth of commercial and colonial ambitions impossible before. But the commercial, and especially the colonial situation which she found before her was not a hopeful one for a new-comer. The Anglo-Saxon race seemed to be in possession of the world. It was with the British Empire that these new German ambitions first came into collision, and it was first against the British Empire that a current of feeling began to form which has run strongly and deeply ever since and at times has threatened to burst all barriers. There followed two things. One was Bismarck's sudden settling upon certain bits of the African continent, which it had been tacitly taken for granted were within the sphere of British influence, thus beginning the open scramble for Africa. The second was the rise of a general criticism of England from the early eighties, expressing itself in public and private in many different ways so bitter as at times to be vituperative, directed against England's history, her past relations with Germany, her methods of conducting foreign business, her naval and colonial policy, and the morality of her political motives—a criticism which Germany's colonial successes have not moderated, but which has rather gained in volume and intensity as time has passed. No student of present European conditions should be misled into supposing that this feeling toward England originated in the Boer war. That war fed it with much inflammable stuff and it blazed up into public sight as it never had before, but that is the only difference between the period of the Boer war and any time, at least since 1885. The proof of the accuracy of this statement is abundant and irresistible. The only astonishing thing about the whole matter is that it took England fifteen years to find out the existing state of things. But there is another point which must be taken into account. The Boer War had been preceded by the war of the United States with Spain and by the sudden and unexpected rise of this country to the

position of a world power occupying important colonial regions. Very many Americans must be aware of the fact that the stream of criticism which until then had run solely against England began with these events to run strongly against us. It bore upon the same points—our historical inconsistencies, our methods of operation, the honesty of our intentions—and since that date every new move of ours in inter-American or in international affairs has been the signal for new outbursts of passion in the German press. The evidence for these facts is also incontrovertible.

I have not mentioned these things by way of criticism on Germany or to excite counter emotions of the same kind. I probably could not do that if I wished to, and I certainly wish far otherwise. This state of feeling in Germany must be judged entirely natural and almost inevitable considering her history since 1860. When, after long struggles, she found herself a united nation, it was highly commendable that she desired to take her place as a power of the first rank not merely in Europe, but in the world. If Germany had been a united nation in 1600 there can be no doubt but that the empire of the world would be differently divided to-day. Because this door had been so long closed to her, because she had been condemned to stand one side and see others partition out the earth, Germany realized, as no other nation did in 1880, the meaning of colonial empire and the narrowness of the provincial future before the people which must remain European only. That was the fate with which she saw herself threatened by the dominance of the Anglo-Saxon race. It is not fair to say that the emotional depths of Germany have been stirred to such bitterness by commercial and colonial ambitions only. It has been by a clearer foresight than has been granted any Anglo-Saxon as yet of the way in which the ultimate position of races is to be determined. If this were the place for it, it would be possible to urge, from the German side at least, strong arguments in defense of this attitude toward England and the United States.

What is the purpose of this account is to assert as vigorously as possible that this feeling, that these three characteristics of Germany's position which have been described, are facts of the most stubborn sort which must be reckoned with by any advocate of disarmament. Theoretical discussions of a lofty ideal, cries of pathetic wonder that civilized

nations should hesitate to adopt so wise and so Christian a method of settling their disputes, and arbitration conventions, and peace prizes, are all of value after their sort in bringing on a better day. But the practical statesman who would devise a scheme not to excite applause, but to work in actual practice, must deal with facts as they are, with inherited tendencies and situations which are not going to be changed this summer.

In the actual situation as it is, no student of international affairs but must say that the most serious obstacle in the way of general disarmament is Germany. Whether you approve or condemn, that is the fact. How are you going to ask France to disarm? How are you going to ask England to stop building Dreadnoughts? The simple truth of the matter is that no nation has ever existed, or exists to-day, which, placed in the same situation as these two are against Germany, would not follow the same policy. This is the fact which the man who proposes any scheme must recognize.

The practical question, then, is twofold. Can the attitude of Germany be changed, or is there any workable possibility under which it can be disregarded? As to change, it seems almost hopeless within any reasonable time. No doubt the complete and permanent triumph of the present Socialist party in Germany—which must not be considered to be exactly what we mean by a Socialist party in this country—would carry with it the desired change. But even if that were possible, the result would not be a simple one, and many who desire disarmament might be excused for questioning the wisdom of reaching it by this means. No other means, however, seems possible except in the slow process of years.

If we turn to the other question and ask is it possible in any way safely to disregard the attitude of Germany and carry out a general disarmament while Germany still maintains the threat of war, there is again only one practical answer. It can be done only by making it possible to combine against any ordinarily conceivable war so great a weight of moral and perhaps of material force that no nation whatever could disregard it. Material force here can have but one meaning; it means men and guns, and that, it is objected, does not mean disarmament. It does not, so far forth, nor do I suppose that any advocate of disarmament means by it, an immediate and total abandonment of all military and naval forces, including those which may

seem desirable for land and sea police duty. Disarmament means the abandonment of the policy of withdrawing from the productive forces of the nation of vast amounts of human energy and acquired capital for no other purpose than to get ready for a possible war. This policy could be entirely abandoned and still leave the possibility of a combined material force which would be formidable and effective against any single nation which proposed to go to war. It would doubtless be slow in action. Beyond all question, a policy of general disarmament, with one nation of warlike disposition still standing to its arms, would mean great risk of temporary loss or even disaster to its immediate neighbors. It would be possible by general action to reduce this risk somewhat, but not to do away with it entirely. The chief reliance must be upon the moral weight of the combined judgment and combined action of the major part of the world. The position of a single nation which obstinately refused to disarm, standing against a general disarmament actually carried out, would shortly be intolerable to itself, and a minority of such nations could sustain themselves in refusal for any long period only by means of an anti-disarmament league, which is hardly conceivable.

All this means, necessarily, disarmament by combination, and it will be objected at once that this means alliance. It certainly does. Unless the dispositions of men change more than is likely in a generation, unless all nations can be brought more nearly to a common level in their feelings about war, in the character of their ambitions, and even in their opinions about the safety of their frontiers, no plan of general disarmament stands any chance of adoption except by way of an alliance, nor is any single nation likely to act alone upon a plan of its own so long as it retains a moderate stock of practical political wisdom. This may be a disagreeable fact, but I do not believe that it is possible for any one to examine impartially the international situation as it is and reach any other conclusion. Alliance, the open and avowed adoption of a common policy, agreement to stand by one another in the results of that policy, are absolutely essential and will be for some time to come. But it should not be forgotten that this is alliance of a new kind, not of the old. It is not an entangling alliance. It is not an offensive alliance. It is an alliance for peace, not for war, an agreement in restraint of passion, of unjust am-

bitions, and in limitation of manifest destinies that infringe upon the manifest destinies of others. It would be a little difficult to show that the ordinary objections against alliances hold for this or to discover a new argument against it.

It is exactly in respect to the considerations advanced in this article that President Taft's proposals for arbitration constitute by far the longest step yet taken toward a practical plan of disarmament. It does not name disarmament. It does not create an alliance. It proposes no more than an agreement in individual cases between two nations only. But in essence it involves the whole. It is the first step on the road that leads to this end, and it can logically lead to no other. Its practical wisdom as an act of the highest statesmanship consists in the fact that it asks for no more than is at the moment possible, not more than may easily be brought about. And yet what is asked for is obviously a beginning only. It tempts to steps beyond itself and leads inevitably to far wider results than the ends at first proposed.

Consider what may easily follow. There is obviously good prospect that three nations—England, France, and Japan—will agree to a treaty of complete arbitration with the United States, individually and separately, of course, but in essential agreement in the terms proposed. It is not likely that the first stage will go beyond this, and in it no disarmament need be expected. It will not be possible. But it is no dream to suppose that there might early develop such a common understanding between these four nations that they would stand ready to say to the most aggressive party in the crisis of an impending war that if the war is begun they also must be reckoned with as allies of the weaker or the better side. Is there any conceivable war, an attack of Russia on China, for example, that would be likely to occur in such circumstances? One only would be difficult to deal with—a combination of Russia, Germany, Austria, and the Balkan States for the dismemberment of Turkey. The probability of such a combination can easily be made out by any one who knows the situation even no more than in its larger details. One other contingency would be awkward—a threatened war by outside nations against one of these four.

Such a common understanding is not, however, the most

likely nor the most desirable line of progress. The second step should be an agreement in practically identical terms for arbitration without reservation, not of three nations with one other, but of each of the four with all the others. This would follow almost of itself and should be expected almost immediately. Before it could be completed other nations would have joined this millennial alliance—Italy, Spain, the minor European nations, the most advanced of the South-American republics. How long would it be before the danger spots of the world would be walled off, the most reluctant or sullen of peoples thrown under an unendurable burden of self-accusation? This is not the vision of a poet. These steps will be as certain and as necessary as the stages of a demonstration in Euclid, once the beginning is made. And the proposition of President Taft makes a beginning which logically involves the whole sequence of events to the final end of universal disarmament and world peace. The greatest practical obstacle that stands in the way of this first step is the Senate of the United States, and the duty of all Americans who desire these things is sufficiently obvious.

“OBSERVER.”